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ABSTRACT

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF THIS DOCUMENT: A parent who notices a gun in his child's room would not hesitate to ask questions and demand answers about its presence. As a school administrator, I believe it is my responsibility to ask questions and take action when I find an equally destructive weapon--drugs--in my schools. The zealous protection of student rights by some courts unfortunately has dampened many school administrators' spirits in this regard. But this is not the time to look the other way. We must renew our commitment to protect children and to eliminate drugs from schools. In my community of Dover, N.H., the local police and the schools have an excellent working relationship. So I recently involved the police chief and several police officers in a school drug search that might well help accomplish those goals. Immadiately after school was dismissed one afternoon--while some students still were in the buildings--the police and I together searched the school buildings thoroughly, using police dogs trained to detect the presence of heroin, cocaine, hashish, and marijuana. When the dogs signaled that a specific locker or desk contained illegal substances, we noted the name of the student assigned to that locker or desk. Then, we telephoned these students and their parents and asked them to view the results of our search. Students were asked to open their lockers in front of their parents and to turn over the contraband to the police. The purpose of this search was not to have kids arrested. The students, in the presence of parents, received warnings. No police records were kept because this exercise was purely an administrative search. I'm pleased to report that a sizeable cache of hard drugs was not found--only traces. Out of 1,500 lockers, only 22 contained drugs. But it was enough to prove that drugs were being used in school. After the search, we asked parents to work with their children through counseling and drug-awareness programs to see if anything could be done about the students' drug use. Finally, we informed students and parents that the next time we conducted a drug search at school, it would be treated as a police investigation. As you undoubtedly are aware, several courts have split in their rulings concerning the use of dogs in searching students and school lockers for drugs. So before I began my experiment, I checked with local attorneys and the police to make sure I was not violating a law or students' rights. Administrators, of course, should not attempt the kind of search I conducted without knowing their legal rights and responsibilities--fully understanding the possible consequences (including public outcry) of such a search. In my case, the support I received from the community was gratifying. I realize that attempting to curb the flow of drugs in schools is a tricky business, but I believe we owe it to students--and ourselves--to make schools as free of drugs as possible. In Dover, my experiment shocked and scared some kids. That's what I wanted to do. Students and their parents learned two lessons: First, parents now know that our schools are willing to work with them to make sure children spend the school day in a drug-free atmosphere. Second, drug "salesmen" in the schools now recognize that administrators once again have assumed the role of protecting students. And everyone--parents, the police, teachers, and children--knows we care enough to get tough on drugs. After the drug search, a local newspaper had this comment: "In the corridors of our local high school, an unspoken notice has been given. Drugs and schools do not mix....While it is true that life contains many gray areas, drugs in a public school is not one of those grays." (Author)

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This school drug search made a point: We care enough to get tough with kids

A PARENT WHO notices a gun in his child's room would not hesitate to ask questions and demand answers about its presence. As a school administrator, I believe it is my responsibility to ask questions and *take action* when I find an equally destructive weapon—drugs—in my schools.

The zealous protection of student rights by some courts unfortunately has dampened many school administrators' spirits in this regard. But this is not the time to look the other way. We must renew our commitment to protect children and to eliminate drugs from schools. In my community of Dover, N.H., the local police and the schools have an excellent working relationship. So I recently involved the police chief and several police officers in a school drug search that might well help accomplish those goals.

Bernard F. Ryder is superintendent of schools in Dover, N.H.

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